

**Governor's Rural Affairs Council
Meeting Minutes – July 19, 2017**

1. The meeting was called to order by Lt. Governor Evelyn Sanguinetti at 10:08 am.

2. Roll Call

Member Agencies Present:

Illinois Department of Agriculture, Don Moffitt
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Erika Kennett
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Wendy Bell (phone)
Illinois Department of Human Services, Francisco Alvarado (phone)
Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Valerie Keener
Illinois Department of Public Health, Heidi Trenholm
Illinois Department of Public Health, Don Jones
Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Amy Walkenbach
Illinois State Board of Education, Colin Hitt
University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service, Anne Silvis
Southern Illinois University, Nina Antoniotti
Illinois Housing Development Authority, Melinda Koenig
Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, Christopher Merrett
Illinois Finance Authority, Patrick Evans
Rural Partners, Blanche Shoup

Not Present: Illinois Farm Bureau, Illinois Department of Aging, Illinois Department of Employment Security, Illinois Community College Board

Citizen Members Present:

Luke Allen
Todd Kaeb
Sonja Reece
Heather Hampton Knodle

Nonvoting Members Present:

Molly Hammond, USDA
Norman Walzer, NIU

Lt. Governor's Office Present:

Evelyn Sanguinetti
Derek Cantu
Susan Wynn Bence
Brian Costin

Quorum determined.

3. Opening Remarks

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti welcomed everyone to the Governor's Rural Affairs Council meeting extending a special thank you to Christopher Merrett and his team at Western Illinois University for being the hosts.

She requested that anyone wishing to address the council to please sign in with Joe Locher.

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti introduced Joe Locher and Sean Hudgens who are currently interning in her office this summer. She also shared a few highlights from her recent travels. Last week, she was able to visit Nina Antoniotti for a telehealth demonstration and also Todd Kaeb to tour his entrepreneurial rural business. She mentioned that the Illinois State Fair, DuQuoin State Fair, and the Farm Progress are happening in the near future. She invited all to stop by her tent at each of the state fairs. Various demonstrations will be held during the fairs including the demonstration of the grain bin rescue tube. The theme for this year's Illinois State Fair is: Experience Rural Illinois. Invest in Small Business. Grow Our Economy.

4. Approval of Meeting Minutes from May 3, 2017.

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti asked if there were any corrections to the minutes. Colin Hitt asked that the minutes be amended to show that he attended by phone. Norm Walzer made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Chris Merrett. Motion passed. Minutes were approved.

5. Approval of Working Group Meeting Minutes

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti asked if there were any corrections to the working group minutes. Norm Walzer made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Amy Walkenbach. Motion passed. Minutes were approved.

6. Annual Report Discussion and Approval

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti explained that an annual report was due to the General Assembly by August 1 of each year. Chris Merrett and the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs work with the Lt. Governor's Office to write the annual report. Information for the report is provided by agency representatives. The Lt. Governor explained that all members should have received a copy of the latest draft prior to this meeting. She requested that Chris Merrett provide an overview and summary of the final draft.

Chris Merrett thanked everyone for attending the meeting today. He then introduced, Kathy Neuman, Interim Provost and Academic Vice President for Western Illinois University. Chris explained that Provost Neuman has been a fabulous advocate for the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs and that he and his department are grateful for her ongoing support.

Provost Neuman welcomed everyone to campus. She stated she was delighted that Western Illinois University could host the meeting. She then thanked Chris Merrett for coordinating today's meeting. In addition, she thanked everyone for all of their work on the council.

Chris provided a brief overview of the annual report and why it is submitted annually to the General Assembly. He explained that with multiple agencies on the council, GRAC is better equipped to provide a more comprehensive view of the State of Illinois. He explained the report is a “work in progress” and if you have suggestions or changes to please email comments to either Susan Bence or himself.

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti thanked Chris for all of his dedication to the GRAC and the rural communities of Illinois. She noted that his dedication is both respected and appreciated. She stated that each agency will now provide a brief summary of what was submitted for the annual report.

Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs – Chris Merrett

Chris explained that the Peace Corps Fellows program receives funding through USDA and AmeriCorps grants. Since these grants have been targeted to be zeroed out by the federal government, Chris thanked Anne Silvis who through University of Illinois Extension has helped provide support. He announced that four new Peace Corps Fellows will start in the fall semester.

Department of Agriculture – Don Moffitt

Don explained his department works on regulations, consumer protection, and the promotion of agriculture. New to his department is the regulating of medical marijuana. Don explained that his agency is responsible to testing scales at a grain elevator or grocery store along with testing GAS. He stated there will be a demonstration of a grain rescue tube at the Illinois State Fair to raise awareness. He is hopeful that there will also be a display of drones which are becoming increasingly important to agriculture. He mentioned that his department has also been recognizing farms that have been in operation for 100, 150, and 200 years.

Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity – Erika Kennett

Erika stated that her department is working across the state to reach communities. Enterprise Zones have been created to increase jobs and opportunities. She provided a brief overview of companies that DCEO has currently been working with on these projects. She stated that DCEO is supporting infrastructure assistance, owner occupied single housing, tourism, and Illinois Made Program which showcases items made in Illinois. Erika mentioned that the company that makes epic pens has employed 80 jobs in Champaign.

Don Moffitt stated that he would like to coordinate with DCEO to promote agri-tourism.

Department of Human Services – Fransisco Alvarado

Fransisco explained that human services saves resources and funding when able to intervene early if there are problems. His department is focusing on three major areas: mental health, developmental disabilities, and barriers to employment. He stated that he wants to work and collaborate with other communities and agencies in Illinois. Fransisco also added a note of thanks to Chris for working on the report.

Department of Natural Resources – Valerie Keener

Valerie stated that her department is working to provide jobs and bring in tourism to state parks in rural areas. She explained that as people visit the state parks money is spent in rural communities. Currently hunting and fishing provide a tremendous economic appeal. The three programs her department is focusing on are: Conservation Reserve Funding, Illinois Recreational Access Program, and the Division of Forestry. She mentioned that education is a very large part of what her

department does. She thanked the Department of Agriculture for their assistance with the problem of Asian Carp.

Department of Public Health – Don Jones

Don stated that 2017 is the 100th anniversary of public health being a state agency. He provided a brief history of public health. His department provides loans or scholarships to medical personnel who will be practicing in areas of shortage. This includes both nurses and doctors. One example is the State Loan Repayment Program (SLRPP, which helps medical professionals pay student loan debt. However, this program has not been funded for a few years due to budget issues.

Environmental Protection Agency – Amy Walkenbach

Amy reported that the EPA works to protect the environment throughout the state and that all parts of the state are equally important. She explained about a previous project that included working with rural farmers to change practices to improve the quality of water.

Don Moffitt commended the Illinois agencies who worked together to accomplish this. Valerie Keener wanted to know if the EPA had a program in place to let other farmers know about this program. Amy stated yes – press releases and videos have been used to educate people. The Lt. Governor thanked Amy and stated that she hoped other communities would soon follow with this project so that they also could improve the quality of water in their area.

State Board of Education – Colin Hitt

Colin explained that his agency is waiting on active legislation of SB1 relating to school funding. He explained that ESSA results are reported on student growth. Comparing how students in one demographic have grown compared to other demographic. He stated that graduation rates will be used as a point of measure. He also reported that dual enrollment is growing and that agriculture education is becoming more popular.

Lt. Governor mentioned that SB1 has not made it to the Governor's desk as of yet.

Erika Kennett wondered if focus will shift back to art and music. Colin explained for the first time an art indicator metric is being developed. Currently his agency is trying to determine which schools can offer and where gaps are in the school system. Colin explained that the state and federal government interfere very little into how a school is operated day to day.

Blanche Shoup questioned if opportunities for entrepreneurship and career type classes will be offered at the elementary and junior high age. Colin explained that most of these emphasis are for high school students.

Sonja Reece stated that it appears rural schools have less opportunity for advanced placement. Colin stated that yes academic placement classes is a current problem for rural schools partly since students who do not pay the fees, will not receive the credit for the class. The State Board of Education is working to reduce these fees for families that have financial need. Sonja exemplified that family encouragement is a problem along with the financial need. Colin agreed with Sonja. Brian Costin stated that SB1 could be on the Governor's desk soon.

Community College Board – Lavonne Nelson

Lavon highlighted their board's work with DCEO. She stated that her board is engaged in diverse initiatives focusing on two grants – workforce education and strategic plan. She also stated that community colleges are working on being able to provide essential occupational skills and what exactly are the essential occupational skills for the State of Illinois. The board also wants to provide non-education skills such as active listening. She stated these initiatives will serve to better connect rural communities and employment opportunities.

In addition, they are focusing on dual credit grants which would allow schools to offer more dual credit classes. Blanch Shoup stated a real concern for business manufactures is that individuals need a variety of skills blended to cover multiple jobs. LaVon agreed that “generalist” need to be taught a broad range of skills besides providing certificate or degree specific training.

Heather Hampton Knodle asked how colleges are determined to be rural. LaVon explained that there is a definition based on population.

University of Illinois Extension – Anne H. Silvis

Anne provided a broad overview of extensions' work across the state. Currently, extension is working on: Youth, Agri/Nature Walks, Family/Consumer Services, and Community/Economic Development. Anne stated that the demand for extension services has exceed their capacity. Extension currently is developing/strengthening partnerships. Anne stated she is impressed by the work that colleagues are doing around the state.

Heather Hampton Knodle added that 4-H helps build citizenship.

Housing Development Authority – Melinda Koenig

Melinda stated this is the 50th anniversary of their agency. The focus is on financing/creation of affordable housing. She stated they are increasing efforts to reach out to rural communities with the hopes of encourage revitalization efforts and provide technical assistance.

Southern Illinois University – Nina Antoniotti

Nina explained that SIU is currently trying to establish TeleHealth for rural areas. Another program being established is a training program to help patients manage pain without opioids. One area of concern is how SIU can continue to meet the needs of patients without receiving payments from the State of Illinois. She stated there is a decline in medical schools' enrollment. Nina announced there will be a TeleHealth Payment Summit in late September to November.

Illinois Finance Authority – Patrick Evans

Patrick thanked everyone for being at the meeting. He stated he is learning a lot from others. His agency provides services to municipalities and small communities. Their areas of focus include: Ag, Education, Health, Government, and Manufacturing.

Don Moffitt commend Patrick about 178 fire departments and the funding success. Heather Hampton Knodle wanted to know how the ambulance program was marketed. Patrick stated that the Office of the State Fire Marshall does the marketing for this program. Don Moffitt stated to keep promoting this program since every minute counts.

Rural Partners – Blanche Shoup

Blanche explained that Rural Partners' emphasis is in partnership with GRAC and IIRA and bringing awareness to key rural issues.

USDA Rural Development – Molly Hammond

Molly stated this is the first GRAC meeting that she has attended and she thanked the Lt. Governor's office for inviting her to participate. One key issue for the USDA is loan forgiveness to individuals, businesses, and communities. She requested that you refer to annual report for more information.

Northern Illinois University – Norm Walzer

Norm thanked Chris and the IIRA for working with him. His current focus is on micro-politician counties. He is also working on how to keep retirees employed even if at part-time status to lessen the shortage of workers.

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti thanked everyone for their contributions. At this point the meeting was turned over to Susan Wynn Bence. Susan asked for a motion to accept the report with changes and suggestions. Please send any additions to Susan by end of this week. Susan noted this is the 30th year for the GRAC.

Don Moffitt mentioned that it is important to keep unappropriated funding at the forefront. Heather Hampton Knodle suggested that the report be rearranged. She also stated that her info was not included. Susan Bence noted the information was not included since the report was received after the deadline. Heather noted that it would be nice to include a rural Illinois background and the connection between energy and rural Illinois including coal mining and unemployment. She noted that energy impacts rural Illinois. She also thinks it would be good idea to close the report with recommendations. Chris Merrett stated that perhaps a map or table could be included to provide a matrix of where GRAC agencies have worked together. Todd Kaeb thought this the map would be a great addition. Anne Silvis stated a dollar savings report might be helpful although it may be difficult to quantify benefits.

Susan Wynn Bence noted that a proof will be sent out to all GRAC members. Brian Costin explained the primary audience for the report is the GRAC with the legislature being the second audience. A discussion was held on why or why not to include recommendations in the report. Susan explained that certain items are included in the report at the request of the Lt. Governor. Susan also noted that format changes may be done in the future, but since the report is due in two weeks, they will not be made in the 2017 report.

Todd Kaeb made a motion to approval annual report as suggestions and additions were noted and received prior to August 1. Don Moffitt second the motion. Heather Hampton Knodle abstained from voting. Motion passed. Annual Report was approved.

7. Working Group Summaries

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti requested a brief update from the working groups.

Health – Sonja Reece explained the focus in on three areas:

1. Telehealth – Alternative health services delivery continue to be important because of funding uncertainties at the state and federal level. New technologies such as telehealth can help maintain and even extend services in rural areas.
2. Behavioral Health – Opioid substance abuse problem continues to be a growing issue.
3. Agriculture Safety – This is a big issue at all times, but is particularly important with the upcoming harvest season.

Workforce Development – Norm Walzer stated the group is focusing on the following areas:

1. Keeping seniors in workforce.
2. Ability to provide broader skills.
3. Need to offset population decline.
4. Transportation needs.
5. Better link between DCEO and Workforce.
6. Changing the role of manufacturing.

Norm announced that policy profiles are on the table if anyone would like to take a copy.

Education – Chris Merrett noted that Luke sends his regrets for missing the meeting. Current issues include:

1. Student teachers. This issue relates to onerous costs for background checks for student teachers doing their in-class training in local communities.
2. Inequality in school resources. The state legislature is currently tackling this complex topic and may pass legislation to implement a new school funding formula that provides more equity in school funding between school districts.
3. CEO program. Part of the challenge in rural communities is slowing the outmigration of young people from rural areas. The CEO program tries to show young people that job opportunities are possible in rural areas if students are interesting in starting their own businesses. The CEO program helps them do that while they attend high school.

Economic Development – Heather Hampton Knodle stated this groups' focus is on the following areas:

1. Red Team DCEO. This is the regional economic development team that works in local communities to spur development.
2. Tourism. Tourism is an important driver of economic development that needs more focus in smaller places.
3. Policy Initiatives. There is overlap or synergies possible here with the workforce development team.
4. Develop rural Illinois economic development strategy.

Blanche Shoup noted that there also needs to be an emphasis on infrastructure and workforce development when discussing economic development. There needs to be more technology investment in rural areas to train workers and help businesses compete.

Norm Walzer suggested a transition plan or guidebook might need to be developed and/or updated. This could be important as each new administration is elected into office. A transition book could make the job of the Lt. Governor less onerous if a transition guide was available documenting past efforts of the GRAC.

Brian Costin stated that he is working on answers to the DCEO presentation and hopefully will have answers by the next meeting.

8. Old Business

Susan Wynn Bence reminded all to complete the ethics and OMA trainings.

9. New Business

Susan Wynn Bence reminded all the next meeting will be:

12-6	Springfield	11 am	Department of AG State Fair Grounds
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Other calendar items include:

8-10 to 8-20	Springfield	Illinois State Fair
8-26 to 9-5	DuQuoin	DuQuoin State Fair
8-29 to 8-31	Decatur	Farm Progress Show

Don Moffitt suggested that agencies representing Fire & EMS services could serve on the GRAC. Susan explained that the council is determined from an executive order and there is no room to add any additional agencies. Perhaps this agency could be added as a non-voting member.

Heather Hampton Knodle wanted to know if the GRAC budget could be added to the annual report. Brian Costin will consider this in the future.

10. Public Comment

Deb Waldrop, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, was present to provide an overview of what her office within DCEO does. Her office works on workforce development and apprenticeship issues. She introduced new apprenticeship programs that could be of interest in rural areas of the state. She stated that DCEO needs to communicate better about this topic and that they are working on that as an agency. She thanked the council for being able to attend.

11. Adjournment

Susan Wynn Bence thanked everyone for their time and dedication.

Sonja Reece made a motion to adjourn. Don Moffitt seconded the motion. Motion passed. The meeting was adjourned at 1:10pm.

Respectfully Submitted:

Chris Merrett
Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs
Western Illinois University